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Walker, Alan

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Mathématiques sans Frontières 2019

Mathématiques sans Frontières is an annual international mathematics competition for schoolchildren, centrally run by the Académie de Strasbourg since 1989. The interclass competition involves a number of mathematical puzzles where one of the puzzles is posed, and must be answered, in a foreign language. The competition was originally devised to open borders between France and her neighbouring countries, between mathematics and modern languages, and between students of all abilities within the same classroom. It promotes an interest in mathematics, teamwork, full class participation, problem solving, and the practice of a foreign language.

Each class may tackle the time-constrained questions as they see fit, either approaching each question as an entire class, individually attempting each question, or splitting the questions between small working groups. This year, Grange Academy (Kilmarnock) shared their recipe for success: a table tracking which students were tackling specific problems; checking each solution; and/or writing up each solution.

Competing teams are sent a training test in January, with the competition questions arriving in the spring. As is the spirit of the competition, schools often make use of their Modern Languages departments, and savvy schools such as Cumbernauld Academy keep their participants' brains fuelled with international delicacies [1].

Fourteen countries from across the world competed this year. The competition consisted of 10 questions (for Junior entries) or 13 questions (for Senior entries). It welcomed 79 entries from 43 different schools across Scotland (and one from England); almost double the number from 2018. The top-ten entries (from each division) were announced at an awards ceremony at the University of the West of Scotland's new Lanarkshire Campus, where representatives were treated to a short lecture on *Careers using Mathematics* from Dr Alan Walker (UWS), alongside their prizes of branded pens, certificates, and chocolates.

The aforementioned Grange Academy, led by Scottish Teacher of the Year Chris Smith [2], were the 2018 winners [3]. This year, eager to retain the Mathématiques sans Frontières shield, they submitted four teams, three at the junior level and one at the senior level. They were up against some stiff competition in the form of Robert Gordon's College (Aberdeen), Wellington School (Ayr), and Girvan Academy.

However, the Grange Academy (Team: Mr Smith's Seniors) managed to hold on to their title in the Senior competition. Robert Gordon's College (Team: RGCAP) and Girvan Academy came second and third respectively. In the Junior competition,



Grange Academy representatives with their shield

Wellington School topped the charts, with the Grange Academy (Team: 3M1) and Caldervale High School (Airdrie) close on their heels.

The outright winner of this year's competition was the Grange Academy Senior team, who managed to score an incredible 100%, which is the first time this has been achieved in Scotland. As well as retaining their title and shield for the year, they were rewarded by a full day visit from the Happy Puzzle Company (puzzlechallengedays.co.uk).

The competition couldn't run without the generous support from Robert D., Robert L., Sandra and Gabriella (North Lanarkshire Council), our translator Wan (UWS), and the team of markers: Alan T., Chris, Jonathan, and Wan. Thanks go to them, to the Scottish Mathematical Council for their generous funding, and to the staff and pupils who engage so well with the competition.

If you are interested in learning more about Mathématiques sans Frontières and/or wish to enter the 2020 competition, please contact Dr Alan Walker (alan.walker@uws.ac.uk), see us on Twitter (@MSF_Scotland), or visit <https://tinyurl.com/yyeb3vvu>.

Alan J. Walker CMath MIMA
University of the West of Scotland

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- 1 Muir, A. (2019) 2019 Mathématiques sans Frontières, tinyurl.com/yxmxthnu (accessed 25 June 2019).
- 2 Scottish Education Awards (2018) tinyurl.com/y2caq5nb (accessed 25 June 2019).
- 3 Walker, A.J. (2018) Grange Academy Win Maths Prize, *Mathematics Today*, vol. 54, no. 4, p.127.